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SEARCH

JANUARY 6 - 12, 2006

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## Zeitlist: Culture

### 2005 in Film

Notes on the pleasures of kiddie moviegoing and weeping into your stir-fry

by ELLA TAYLOR

For the first time in ages, only one splashy holiday movie, and that with reservations, makes my 10 list. Unless you count children's movies, no less than three of which show up (with a little sleight of hand) on my list, there's been precious little studio output to write home about this year. But it's been a banner year for foreign film in general (six, if you count a Canadian) and Asian film in particular (three), for nonfiction film (see Honorable Mentions) and, above all, for acting (see Great Performances). Arbitrary, arguable and unranked, here are my Top 10, er, 13 movies of the year:

What do you think guides our lives?

- Fate
- Luck
- Freewill
- Vote

Now Playing in Select Theaters

**1. *A History of Violence*.** If you're going to take potshots at the United States' love affair with killing and mayhem (take that, Lars von Trier!), *A History of Violence* is as intricately elaborated as it gets, a beautifully ugly movie that suggests violence is so thoroughly, so carnally burned into the American body and soul, it's fundamental to our collective nature.

**2. Cheat alert!** *Chicken Little* aside, there hasn't been a year in recent memory when it's been as much fun to take a child to the movies: *Howl's Moving Castle*, another gorgeously handmade treasure from the house of Miyazaki, in which a shy young girl grows old and gnarly in order to learn the meaning of courage; *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, so very Yorkshire, yet so very everywhere, its gentle wit shows to perfection that you can engage kids without shrieking at them; Carroll Ballard's heart-stoppingly beautiful *Duma*, about a cheetah teaching a boy that nature must be left to itself. I'll grant you *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was an extremely well-



## FEUILLETONS

Sketches, Whimsies, Curios and Ephemera of All Kinds

[Monkey News](#) by BRYAN GARDINER

[10 Acts of Celebrity Kindness](#) by MARGY ROCHLIN

[Deadly Latin Things](#)

[10 Prurient Terms From Board and Card Games](#)

[9 Presidents Who Had Hooks for Hands, Colonial Jobs Involving Eels, and Other Areas](#) of JOHN HODGMAN's Expertise

[8 Reasons NASA Should Not Shoot for the Moon Again](#) by MARGARET WERTHEIM

[10 Heart Softenings.](#)

[6 Recent Penis-Related Activities](#)

[11 Secrets of Swarm Success](#) by GENDY ALIMURUNG

[20 new Designer Dogs](#)

[Glands of the Year](#)

[The 10 Worst Comics in the L.A. Times](#)

[Promised Yourself You'd Finish But Didn't](#)

[C'Mon, Dodgers, WTF? Blue Sox Meditations](#) by JON ALAIN GUZIK

[5 Wonderful Things](#)

[10 Reasons to Switch to Scientology](#)

[American Automobilia in 6 Strokes](#)

[Patented Ways to Improve Your Life](#)

[9 Reasons UCLA Will Beat USC Next Year](#)

[The Quotable \(Robert\) Blake](#) by STEVEN MIKULAN

[Reasons to Join the Clippers Bandwagon](#)

## CULTURE

The Year in Music, Film, TV, Books and More

[10 Signs of the Indie Apocalypse](#) by ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

[2005's Best Outsider and Experimental Music](#) by DOUG HARVEY

[The Chronicles of Namia](#), a graphically informative infographic by KATE SULLIVAN and MAX KORNELL

[5 Blogs for Musical Archaeologists](#) by REVEREND DAN

[15 Writers Share Their Must-Reads](#)

[5 Overlooked Books](#)

[3 List-Obsessed Books and 3 Books](#)

made movie, but my judgment was colored by the 7-year-old sobbing with terror in my lap from start to finish, and by the fact that I've never made it through more than 10 enervatingly eventful pages of a J.K. Rowling tome. And while we're with the kids, Finnish director Pirjo Honkasalo's ***The 3 Rooms of Melancholia***, which I saw at Sundance last year and which you must not miss if and when it screens here in 2006, is a lyrically horrifying meditation on the vulnerability of children of war — in this case, Chechnya.

**3. *Crash*.** 2005's most misunderstood American movie, at least by critics who deemed it racist and crude. Though I can't agree with director Paul Haggis that it's not about race (of course it is, it's about Los Angeles), this furious rant is also the funniest, most serious and most bizarrely hopeful evocation I've seen of how prejudice functions as the expression of Angeleno anger at being choked to death by traffic, and by the loneliness of the crowd in a city where the closest thing to direct public communication is road rage.

**4. *Kings & Queen*.** French writer-director Arnaud Desplechin never shuts up, but the logorrheic ramblings of his baffled characters are delivered with such urbane panache and periodic profundity, you can't help but warm to this hefty, 150-minute disquisition on the underground anxieties that bubble up in a seemingly orderly bourgeois life.

**5. *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*.** Sticking with *les très French films*, *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*, Jacques Audiard's brilliant remake of James Toback's *Fingers*, reminds us, as so few movies do these days, that in the right hands, film editing is as powerful an emotional language as dialogue. That, and a masterful turn by Romain Duris as a young hood torn between thuggery and art.

**6. *Brokeback Mountain*.** A lot of gay males hate it, but though *Brokeback Mountain* doesn't represent Ang Lee's best filmmaking by a long chalk, it's not hard to understand why it swept the critics' awards and may yet carry off Best Picture come February. Heath Ledger's introverted performance makes you see that this is not so much a movie about gay oppression as it is a wonderfully broody elegy for possibilities forgone and the failure of romantic courage. Now let's see how it plays in Wyoming.

**7,8,9.** I'm grouping together Wong Kar-Wai's ***2046***, Jia Zhang Ke's ***The World*** and Apichatpong Weerasethakul's ***Tropical Malady*** not just because they represent the vibrancy of Asian film, but because each in its different but equally lyrical way meditates soulfully on the loss of love, memory and community — and because they all made me weep uncontrollably into my stir-fry.

**10. *Junebug*.** Along with David Gordon Green's *George Washington*, Phil Morrison's languid, intimately observed movie about a family falling apart and (maybe) coming together is the least condescending movie about Southern character I've ever



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[Histories of Violence: Haunted Pasts in 2005's Best Films](#) by SCOTT FOUNDAS

[High '05 in Clubland](#) by LINA LECARO

[2005 in Metal and Jazz](#) by GREG BURK

[Indignant, Irony and Bloody Machinations: 2005's Theater Top 11](#) by STEVEN LEIGH MORRIS

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seen. Morrison gets the very best out of a gifted cast, notably Amy Adams, Celia Weston and Scott Wilson.

## HONORABLE MENTION

Features: *Head-On*; *Capote*; *Good Night, and Good Luck*; *Ushpizin*; *Best of Youth*; *Walk on Water*; *Last Days*; *My Summer of Love*; *Look at Me*; *Tony Takitani*; *Nina's Tragedies*; *Saraband*; *Dolls*; *Down to the Bone*; *Kontroll*; *Me and You and Everyone We Know*; *Bee Season*; *Walk the Line*; *Schultze Gets the Blues*; *Nobody Knows*; *Almost Peaceful*; *Assisted Living*; *Caché*; *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; *The Constant Gardener*; *Corpse Bride*; *Syriana*; *The Talent Given Us*; *Everything Is Illuminated*; *The Upside of Anger*.

Nonfiction: *Another Road Home*; *Ballets Russes*; *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*; *Romantico*; *Tell Them Who You Are*; *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*. And — I guess — *Grizzly Man*, whose subject is hardly worth the adroit filmmaking that went into memorializing him.

## DISHONORABLE DISCHARGE

*Sin City*: Skillful. Stupid. Hateful.

## GREAT PERFORMANCES

Jeff Daniels in *The Squid and the Whale*; Daniel Auteuil in *Caché*; Naomi Watts in *Ellie Parker* and *King Kong*; Joan Allen and Kevin Costner in *The Upside of Anger*; Charlize Theron and Richard Jenkins in *North Country*; Natalie Press in *My Summer of Love*; Matt Dillon and Terrence Howard in *Crash*; Vera Farmiga in *Down to the Bone*; Emmanuelle Devos in *Kings & Queen*; Philip Seymour Hoffman and Catherine Keener in *Capote*; David Strathairn and Frank Langella in *Good Night, and Good Luck*; Michael Lonsdale in *Munich*; Felicity Huffman in *Transamerica*; Cillian Murphy in *Breakfast on Pluto*; Heath Ledger and Michelle Williams in *Brokeback Mountain*; Joseph Gordon Levitt in *Mysterious Skin*; Tom Wilkinson in *Separate Lies*; Richard Gere in *Bee Season*; Georgie Henley in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Lior Ashkenazi in *Walk on Water*; Sibel Kekilli in *Head-On*; Maria Bello in *A History of Violence*; Lisa Kudrow in *Happy Endings*; and, of course, Gromit — dear, kind, strong, silent Gromit, unassuming hero of a world far better than the one we live in. Gromit for President!

## MOVIE MOMENTS TO CHERISH

Naomi Watts, juggling first for her life, then for the love of a great ape in *King Kong*.

Super-goy James Bond (Daniel Craig), coming on all Yiddish in *Munich*: "It's a *shanda* for the goyim!"

Two desolate penguin parents keening over the loss of their baby in *March of the Penguins*. Anthropomorphic? Maybe, but

grief is grief even if you waddle on two flippers.

[Rock Like an Egyptian: The Year in Greg Burk](#)

 [E-mail this story](#) to a friend.

[Old-School Sure-Fire Tear-Inducing Karaoke Playlist](#)

 [Printer-friendly](#) version available.

[Replies to Questions Posed in the Songs of My Youth](#)

[10 Tragically Short-Lived Hollywood Nightclubs of 2005](#)

### STORIES FROM THE WEEKLY'S BLOGS:

JUDITH LEWIS with an [update on mine safety and disinformation](#). Lewis' [original post here](#).

BILL BRADLEY's [New West Notes blog on the State of the Arnold State](#).

MARC COOPER on [the stories that will define political debate in '06](#).

DOUG IRELAND on [why gay TV blows](#).

Speaking of blowing it, JON GUZIK's Turf Toe [monday morning quarterbacks the Rose Bowl](#).

MR. FISH's [peace movement](#).

THE STYLE COUNCIL on the [snails, chocolate fountains and marketing opportunities for alcohol companies](#).

JOSHUAH BEARMAN on [the madness of King George](#).

### WEB EXCLUSIVE:

[LIVE IN L.A.: Donita Sparks at Spaceland](#) by ANDREW LENTZ

## columns

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